The Ecclesiological Society

DRAFT

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Held online on Friday 13 June 2025, 6.30pm

Chaired by Mark Kirby, Chairman of Council.

Apologies: Paul Barnwell, Frances Cook, Paul Gray, Ruth Lankester, Fiona Rosen, Graham White, Aland and Cynthia Yates.

AGM papers: The agenda and draft AGM Minutes, draft Annual Accounts, and Annual Report for 2025 had been made available on the Society's website.

Welcome: The Chairman welcomed attendees. 122 people had registered to attend (In the event, a maximum of 44 were present for the AGM, and 66 for the lecture.)

1. Minutes of the 2024 AGM. No comments were received and therefore the minutes were considered to be accepted.

2. Annual report. Becky Payne, Secretary, provided a summary of the year's events and activities, a full version of which is available on the Society's website. https://www.ecclsoc.org.uk/annual-reports In summary:

Three successful visits had taken place: a tour of churches in and around Richmond led by Paul Velluet; a tour of churches in York led by Rob Andrews; and a Study Day in South Wales focussing on St Cadoc, Llancarfan and St Illtud, Llantwit Major, led by Madeleine Gray and Philip Morris.

The 2024 conference was held at St Alban's Centre, Holborn on 28 September on the subject of Competing Churches and Chapels, 1829–1939 and was held jointly with the Chapels Society. 67 people attended.

The Society's Annual Lecture took place after the AGM on Thursday 15 April 2024 and was held online. It was given by Professor Nicholas Orme, on the theme of Cathedrals and the Reformation.

The second Geoff Brandwood Memorial Lecture was held on Tuesday 26 November at the parish hall at St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate, City of London. The speaker was Dr James Wright and his theme medieval myth-busting, with special emphasis on so-called leper squints, arrow stones, and burn marks. As usual, the lecture was followed by wine and refreshments.

The Society issued four eNewsletters during the course of the year (free to anyone who signs up). In March 2024, we published Volume 4 of the Society's conference proceedings, *Last Rites: Funerals and Funeral Monuments*, comprising the papers from the joint conference held with the Church Monuments Society in 2022.

Issue 63 of *Ecclesiology Today* was published in December 2024 and two editions of *Church Crawler* were published during the course of the year.

The Society made preparations for the launch of a new website (which took place in early 2025). 47 new members were welcomed, while membership of Council remained unchanged.

No comments were received, so the 2024 Annual Report was deemed to be accepted.

3. Accounts for 2024. The draft Accounts had been published on the Society's website. The Chairman reported that the Society had made a profit of just over £3,000 in 2024. However, the invoices for *Ecclesiology Today* 63 (published in December 2024) were only received in January 2025 and in reality, there had been an operating loss of £5,169 in 2024. The Society was investigating ways of reducing costs and also considering an increase in membership subscriptions (see item 5). The new website had been launched at no cost to the Society, for which the Chairman expressed gratitude to Graham White.

The Chairman noted that the Independent Examiner of the Accounts, Mark Ockelton, had requested that the Accounts make reference to the Life Members Fund. This would be included and revised Accounts would be placed on the Society's website.

No questions or queries were raised and the Accounts were therefore deemed to be received and accepted.

4. Membership subscriptions. A note on these had been circulated with the agenda. The Chairman summarised:

The last increase in membership fees was in 2022. Since then, we have seen a period of higher inflation and a significant increase in postage costs. Early increases in costs were met from reserves, and significant other savings had also been made. In addition to these measures, we propose to reduce costs by no longer sending publications to members who (despite reminders) continue to pay their subscriptions by standing order at the pre-2022 rate. We will also post *Ecclesiology Today* and the conference proceedings together and send *Church Crawler* by email except to those members who have paid the correct subscription and who specifically ask for a paper copy (for which there will be a charge). Together these measures will save the Society an estimated £4,000 each year. However, further measures are needed and the Council does not feel it prudent to continue eating into the Society's reserves. It is therefore proposed to increase the standard membership rate to £35, with equivalent increases to other categories of membership. Now that most of our subscriptions are collected by direct debit, Council expects future increases to be annual and in smaller amounts, rather than every several years in larger amounts.

The proposed increase in subscriptions was put to the vote of members and approved unanimously.

6. To record members' appreciation of the contribution made by the Society's President, the Right Revd. Bishop David Stancliffe, on his retirement from the role: The Chairman noted that Bishop David was a distinguished ecclesiologist with a deep understanding of liturgy and the architectural setting of worship, perhaps a rare combination these days. He had chaired the Church of England Liturgical Commission from 1993 to 2005 after his consecration as bishop of Salisbury and had supported the Society in the role of President for many years. Thanking Bishop David on behalf of Council, the Chairman proposed that he be elected as President emeritus and Vice-President of the Society.

Before that was put to the vote, Bishop David spoke briefly. He welcomed the nomination of the Revd. Prof. Diarmaid MacCulloch, who had been a fellow student at Cuddesdon College. Bishop David recalled his early interest in liturgy and architecture, sparked by the churches of Cornwall and the designs of F. C. Eden. He had also been inspired by the church at Thaxted, free of pews and a refreshing contrast to the Tractarian churches of his youth. He had learned that buildings only came alive when in use. He had been honoured to serve as the Society's President but now lived much of the year in Italy and therefore considered it time to hand on this privilege.

The proposal that Bishop David be thanked for his years of service and that he be elected as President emeritus and Vice-President of the Society was put to the vote of members and approved unanimously.

6. Election of the Revd. Prof. Diarmaid MacCulloch, Kt., as the Society's President: The Chairman was delighted to introduce Professor MacCulloch, a distinguished historian and ecclesiologist, who had been a Vice-President of the Society since 2011. He proposed that Professor McCullough be elected as the Society's new President.

Professor McCullough said it was a tremendous honour to be nominated for this role. With other charitable organisations dedicated to the love and care of church buildings, the Society was part of 'a joyous cloud of witness' which was needed now as much as ever. He referred to current proposals to amend the Pastoral Measure, which would weaken external scrutiny and facilitate the closure of churches. This was unacceptable and called into question the continued justification for the ecclesiastical exemption from listed building control. Organisations such as the Ecclesiological Society had tremendous collective wisdom and knowledge and they should use this wisely.

The Chairman thanked Professor McCullough for his thought-provoking words.

The proposal that Professor McCullough be elected as President of the Society was put to the vote of members and approved unanimously.

7. Election of honorary officers and members of the Council. The following nominations had been received: Chairman: Dr Mark Kirby; Deputy Chairman: Andrew Derrick; Editor of *Ecclesiology Today*: Nick Chapple; Editor of *Church Crawler*: Phil Draper; Secretary: Becky Payne; Reviews Editor: Dr Christopher Webster; Membership Secretary and Website Manager: Graham White; Communications Manager: Paul Gray; Visits Secretary: Frances Cook; Events Administrator: Fiona Rosen. eNewsletter Editor: Zia Simpson.

Online responses confirmed that the meeting was happy for those nominated to be elected *en bloc*.

The Chairman added his personal thanks to Paul Barnwell and Antony Gilmour, who were stepping down from Council; their knowledge and expertise would be greatly missed. He also welcomed Zia Simpson and complemented her on the quality of eNewsletters already produced.

8. Honorary Auditor. Mark Ockelton was thanked and commended for his careful scrutiny of the Society's accounts. He was duly re-elected as Hon Auditor (independent examiner), *nem con*.

9. Any other business. The Chairman gave notice of this year's conference, which would be held at the church of St James-the-Less, Pimlico on Saturday 4 October, on the theme of Twentieth Century Cathedrals. He thanked members of Council for their support over the year and in particular thanked Graham White and Becky Payne for going 'above and beyond'.

There being no other business, the AGM concluded at 7.15 pm.

The AGM was followed by the Society's Annual Lecture, given by Professor John Cooper on 'St Stephen's Chapel Westminster and the House of Commons, 1292-1950'. The lecture drew upon Professor Cooper's leadership of a three-year major research project between the University of York, the Palace of Westminster, the History of Parliament Trust and the Institute of Historical Research, which explored every facet of the chapel's long and fascinating ecclesiastical and political history. Begun in 1292 as a college of canons, possibly as an architectural 'reply' to Louis IX's Ste Chapelle, this was 'one of the most graceful and prestigious commissions of the English Crown'. The college was dissolved in 1548, the building later becoming a chamber for the House of Commons, 'one of the most significant architectural takeovers in English history'. The upper chamber was remodelled and provided with galleries by Sir Christopher Wren in about 1710. The building was re-Gothicised by James Wyatt in about 1820 but seriously damaged by fire in 1834. Sir Charles Barry originally proposed that it should be restored, but for reasons not entirely clear the building was demolished in 1837 and survives only as a ghost or echo in the modern Palace of Westminster (although fragments remain). The current research project has included digital reconstructions (evocative but inevitably somewhat speculative) of the building's medieval interior.

The Chairman thanked the speaker for a fascinating presentation, which had shed much light on an important but curiously little-known building. He thanked the other speakers, and closed the meeting at 20.24 pm.